

Prayer as Worship

An Examination of Matthew 6:9&10

Part 2

Matt 6:9&10

9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

Let's look at just those first two verses, and the four initial elements of prayer that give us the focus on prayer as an act of worship. Prayer is primarily worship. It is God-ward. Prayer is not an opportunity for me to get something- it is an opportunity for God to be glorified. And that has to be the focus in our prayers. My prayers are not primarily for what I can gain but for the Glory of God.

Our Father

First of all, there is God's Paternity- that is the concept that God is Father. "**Our Father who art in heaven,**" this is the basis of our *boldness* in prayer. We go to God because He is not only our King; He is not only our Monarch; He is not only our Judge; He is not only our Creator- but He is also our Father. And that beautiful expression gives us the sense of access and the boldness to come intimately into His Presence as a son or a daughter would come to the presence of their own father.

Isaiah 64:8

But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.

...that's the recognition. *"Lord, You made us; You gave us life; You gave us birth; You supply our resources; We belong to You through the link of common life through Faith in Jesus Christ. We are Your children because You are our Father!"*

And, so, when we come to God in prayer- we come first of all to One Who is our Father. And this concept is very different from the pagans- who come to a vengeful, angry, violent, unfair, unjust, cruel, jealous, envious, man-made deity whom they had to constantly appease or die. We don't have to appease God- God is appeased through Jesus- and that allows us the freedom to come to our loving Father.

Matthew 7:7-11

7 Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

8 For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

9 Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

10 Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

11 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

Why is that so? Why is it true that we can ask and it shall be given unto us? Why is it that we can seek and find? Why is it true that we can knock and it shall be opened unto us? Are we to assume that we receive what we ask for, and we find what we seek after, and it is opened unto us when we knock because of some inherent righteousness on our part? Is that why we get what we pray about? God forbid.

No, Jesus gave us an example in these verses to illustrate to us why we receive things in prayer:

9 ... what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

10 Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

11 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

In other words, our confidence and our boldness in coming to God with whatever is on our heart is based initially on the fact that He is our Father. And this was a new revelation in many ways to the Jews when Jesus said this. At that time- they saw God as Father only in a national sense. The phrase- "*Our Father*" is a very uncommon phrase in the Old Testament- it only appears 14 times. And the phrase "*My Father*," that is an *individual* expression of a person to God as his personal Father, **never** appears anywhere in the Old Testament. So, if God is seen as Father at all in the Old Testament- He is seen only as the "Father of the nation," and not as an intimate loving Father individual believers.

It was not until Jesus came and revealed God as this intimate loving Father that He really becomes one to whom we can say, "*My Father*." And the Apostle Paul says we can call God "*Abba Father*," which is an ancient Aramaic term that literally means "papa" or "daddy".

Romans 8:15

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

Galatians 4:6

And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

Those are terms of endearment- terms of intimacy. And, so, God is our Father. Jesus called God "*Father*" over 70 times in the New Testament. And every time He prayed- Jesus called God, "*Father*"- with only one exception and that was the time when Jesus was separated from God on the Cross bearing our sin, and then He said, "**My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?**"

That intimacy was lost in the moment of spiritual death and spiritual separation. But after the Resurrection- Jesus said,

John 20:17

... **Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.**

So, in our prayers- we are going to a God- Who is our Father- our loving Heavenly Father. And we can go to Him with a sense of intimacy. And We can go with boldness and confidence as a child would go to his own father. No fear is there.

Now this was a new revelation because the Jews saw God as very separate, and the Jews wouldn't even speak or write the Name of God. Whenever the Name of God came along- they either left a blank on the page; or they only wrote down the consonants of His Name (YHVH), and they never spoke it out loud.

They were so distant from God, and God had become so fearful to them that He was not near or intimate. And when you add to that the Greco-Roman culture- you'll find that they basically had the same idea about God. The pagan "gods" that they had created were "gods" who were absolutely beyond any concern with mankind.

For example- the Stoics- the famous philosophical group among the Greeks and the Romans- they had decided that the essential worthwhile attribute of God was what they called *apathea*. So their "god" was apathetic- not in the sense of the English word because *apathea* means much more than simple indifference- it means: *incapable of feeling anything; without any pathos; without any feeling; and without any emotion.*

And the Greeks reasoned among themselves that because Man feels Love and Hate and Joy and Sorrow, and because Man feels Contentment and Anger- Man is volatile, and all the problems of life are bound up in Man's ability to feel the full range of emotion. Therefore a supreme God could never be a victim of those base things.

So, in order to set God apart from the struggle of Man and make Him appear *greater* than Man- the Greek concept of God was a Being Who is absolutely *apathea*, or beyond feeling anything at all. And so the Stoics said that God doesn't have the essential ability to experience any feeling at all.

But Jesus said that's just not true. We may come to God as our loving Heavenly Father, and He responds because He genuinely and fully cares. The God of the Bible is not passionless, emotionless, or unfeeling.

The pagan Epicureans set another attribute that they thought was the primary attribute of God, and that comes from the word *ateraxia*. This means:

perfectly serene and perfectly calm. And it's essentially the same idea that the Stoics had. These pagans said that if God were involved in the affairs of the world- God would be just as upset as everybody else is. So, for God to maintain His Holy Serenity- He must be absolutely incapable of feeling anything that would disturb His permanent state of Calm.

So, they taught God as being some kind of a feelingless, passionless, emotionless, serene Personality that had no feeling at all- no matter what was going on in the world. And the Jews really felt that God was so far away that they couldn't even speak His Name.

And it was in this setting that Jesus burst onto the scene and began to talk of a loving caring Father, and about the intimacy with which men and women can actually know God.

Thomas Hardy, the English author of the naturalist movement of the early 20th Century was asked about the value of prayer and he responded,

"What possible use could prayer be to anyone, because when you pray, all you're praying to is the dreaming dark dumb thing that turns the handle of this idol show."

For Hardy- God was some "dreaming, dark, dumb, thing". And Voltaire- the champion of the French Revolution, and the father of modern Humanism- said,

"prayer is nothing but a bad joke- so ring down the curtain- the farce is done."

And H.G. Wells- the father of modern Science Fiction, in one of his novels painted a picture of a man who was defeated by the stress and strain and tension of modern life. His only hope was trying to find fellowship with God and the man said this,

"I would as soon think of cooling my throat with the Milky Way or shaking hands with the stars."

... Wells' "god" was unfeeling and indifferent.

Albert Einstein was interviewed on one occasion. He was asked if he believed in a God. He said that there is:

"definitely some kind of cosmic force that created all things"

But, then Einstein went on to say,

"But we could never know Him personally."

But, Jesus said that's just not true. God is not emotionless. God is not utterly detached. God is seen to us in Jesus Christ- to carry all the passion that could ever be carried- to weep; to know sorrow; to know joy; to know pain; to know

all of human emotion and thus He is a loving and caring Father Who understands what His children endure.

The Issue of Fear is Forever Settled in God's Fatherhood

And we go to a God Who does not need to be appeased by us- but One Who appeased Himself through Jesus Christ and is able now to embrace us as His Own. So that settles the matter of any fear we might have about God's Wrath against our sins forever. I'm not afraid of God's Fury against me- even though I am a sinner- because Jesus Christ has made me acceptable with God through His sinless Life and His Death, Burial, and Resurrection. So rather than God being distant and me being cast away- God is now near in Jesus and I'm His child. He's adopted me into His family.

The Issue of Hope is Forever Settled in God's Fatherhood

But God being my Father also settles the matter of Hope. I know that difficult things will change because a loving Father will do what a loving Father needs to do for His Own children. If we ask God for bread- He won't give us a stone. If we ask God for a fish- He won't give us a snake. But whatever we ask- God will do that for His loving children- as long as it fits within His will. So that settles the matter of hope forever. We can live in hope in this world because we know our God is a loving Father.

The Issue of Loneliness is Forever Settled in God's Fatherhood

And God being my Father also settles the matter of loneliness. We may not have a friend in this world as we would like to have a friend- but we always have in God- a friend Who sticks closer than any brother. We have in God a Father Who will never leave us nor forsake us. And there is an intimacy in this Divine Love that takes away any loneliness. A believer can be without human resources and still have the fullness of the Presence of God and thereby be satisfied.

The Issue of Selfishness is Forever Settled in God's Fatherhood

Fourthly, it settles the matter of selfishness. Notice what Jesus said, "**Our** Father." And it says "**Our** daily bread" in verse 11 and "**our** debts" and "**our** debtors" and "**us** into temptation," and "deliver **us** from evil." The point is that all of our praying embraces a family concept. We're not alone in this- we have brothers and sisters who also are the children of God. And whatever we ask must embrace them as well. In other words, we should not pray selfish prayers- "*God, give me what I want*" because what I want may negatively affect another member of the family. This concept of "our" and "us" that Jesus gave eliminates selfish prayers forever.

The Issue of Provision is Settled Forever in God's Fatherhood

It also settles the matter of resources in our prayer life. Jesus said, "Our Father who art in heaven." God is not bound to earth- He's not limited by the limitation of the earth. We are used to a declining amount of resources. We hear all the time that the natural resources of this world are diminishing. And that's true. We understand the law of entropy that things are winding down- that everything is moving toward disintegration and extinction. And we understand what it means to use something up. You buy the box full and in a week the box is empty- we understand that. You pour out the bottle and the bottle is empty. But in terms of spiritual and eternal resources- that doesn't even exist. There is the pouring out of all resources and the diminishing of none.

The Issues of Wisdom and Obedience is Settled Forever in God's Fatherhood

It also settles the matter of wisdom. When we go to God as Father- we must acknowledge that regardless of the way it looks to us- our Father knows best. God is all wise, and so we trust that whatever God allows or brings into our lives will work together with everything else for the greater good of God's Glory. And this wisdom also settles the matter of obedience. A Father is to be obeyed- and even Jesus obeyed the Father, and that's part of the father/child relationship.

So, when I pray "*Our Father*," what I'm really saying is, "*God, I recognize that I'm Your child. I recognize that You love me and I have an intimate access to You. I recognize that You have absolutely unlimited resources which could be used at my disposal. I recognize that You have a family larger than myself who has needs. I recognize You're going to do what is best for me. I recognize that I need to obey You. And I recognize that whatever You do, You know best.*" And that's how prayer begins. It begins with an affirmation of the fact that God is my Father, that means resources, that means obedience, that's the heart of it. All the resources are there. And the call to obedience is there as well.

The Bible says that God knows when a sparrow falls. The great Reformed Theologian, J.E. McFadden, said that when the Bible says, "a sparrow falls", if you look at the Greek- it really means more than just "fall"- so it's not just that God knows when a sparrow falls to the ground in the sense of death. The word really means "lights". And he says it's better to translate it like this,

"God knows every time a sparrow hops or lights to the ground."

So in other words- nothing escapes the knowledge of God. Every time an insignificant bird- like a sparrow hops on the ground, or lights on the ground, from flying- it is known and ordained by God. He sees it and He knows it because He ordained it!

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.